

# Social Stratification: Sex and Gender Part I



Culture does not make people.  
People make culture.  
If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture,  
then we can and must *make* it our culture.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



# Sex and Gender Stratification

- ...males' and females' unequal access to property, power and prestige
- Gender is especially significant because gender is a **master status** cutting across all aspects of life.
- Globally, gender is the **primary division between people** and occurs in the areas of paid employment, education, politics and violence against women.





# Sex and Gender Stratification

- Gender stratification in any society requires...
  - individual **socialization** into traditional gender roles within the family
  - **promotion** and **support** of these traditional roles by other social institutions
- Because society sets up barriers to deny women equal access, they are referred to as a minority even though they outnumber men ... **minority refers to power**, not numbers.





# Sex and Gender Stratification

- Women are a minority group because
  - distinguished by physical, cultural or social characteristics
  - share of desired goods is limited by the dominant group
  - ideological or other justifications are used to deny them equal treatment
  - they have a collective identity used to help insulate them from unequal treatment
  - minority group status is generally determined by rules of descent, with members born into a status they cannot change
  - benefited from the civil rights era



# Sex

- **sex**: biological characteristics
  - female and male
  - **primary sex characteristics**: body structures directly concerned with reproduction
  - **secondary sex characteristics**: characteristic differences between males and females not directly related to reproduction (*males*: deeper voice, heavier musculature, more body hair, etc ... *females*: softer features, wider hips, more fat tissue, etc)





# Gender

- **gender**: social characteristics ... the range of characteristics pertaining to and differentiating between masculinity and femininity
- **masculinity**: set of attributes, behaviors and roles associated with boys and men ... As a social construct, it is distinct from the definition of the male biological sex (a male can have feminine behaviors, etc).
- **femininity**: set of attributes, behaviors and roles generally associated with girls and women ... Femininity is socially constructed, but made up of both socially-defined and biologically-created factors.



# Gender

- **gendered behavior**: an expression of sex categories as well as a socially-constructed set of practices layered on top of a biological base.
- **gender based beliefs**: ideas and expectations about what is appropriate behavior for males and females
- **gender stereotypes**: beliefs that members of a culture hold about how females and males should behave ... what behaviors are appropriate and accepted ... stereotypes that prescribe how males and females *should* be





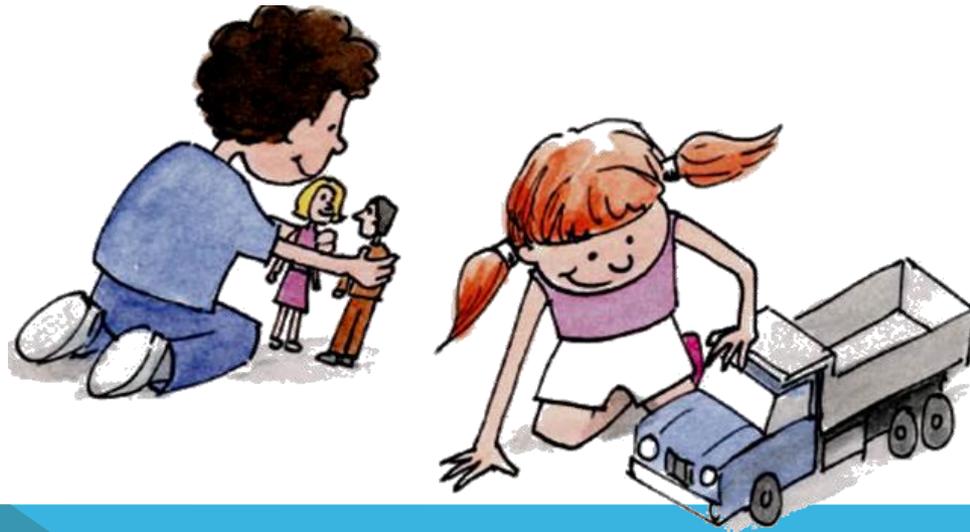
# Gender

- **gender identity**: young children develop a perception of themselves based on whether they are more masculine or more feminine
- **gender typing**: process by which children acquire values, motives, behaviors that are considered appropriate for their gender in their particular culture
- **gender roles**: reflection of male and female ... the roles a typical male or female takes on ... are evident in work and in how we react to others



# Gender

- **gender-role preference**: desire to possess certain gender-type characteristics ... choice of toys and play partners
- **sexual preferences**: preference for same sex or opposite sex partners ... develops in late childhood or adolescence





# Gender Differences In Behavior: Biology or Culture

- Sex is a biological concept, while gender is a social concept and refers to the social and cultural differences a society assigns to people based on their sex.
- Several biological explanations for gender roles exist.
  - nature vs. nurture: Scientists accept that development proceeds according to multiple, intertwined biological *and* environmental influences.
  - After a surgical accident, a one-year old boy was castrated and given a vagina. He was dressed as a girl and given a female name. The effort failed and eventually, the “girl” reverted to being a boy.



# Gender Differences In Behavior: Biology or Culture

- Several biological explanations for gender roles exist.
- The field of **evolutionary psychology** argues an evolutionary basis for traditional gender roles.
- Hypothesize that gender differences are rooted in certain evolutionary processes that spanned millennia.
- Attribute males' higher levels of aggression to their higher levels of **testosterone**.
- **Vietnam veteran study**: boys and men who have higher levels of testosterone tend to be more aggressive





# Gender Differences In Behavior: Biology or Culture

- Sociologists think culture and socialization are more important sources of gender roles than biology.
- primarily social factors, not biological
- would be less variation if biological





# Social Construction of Gender: Experiment in Gender Norm Violation

In an experiment testing gender-role stereotypes, sociology students were asked to behave in ways that might be regarded as violations of gender norms, and to keep notes on how others reacted. This is a sample of their choices of behavior over a seven-year period.

## **Norm Violations by Women**

- Send men flowers
- Spit in public
- Use men's bathroom
- Buy jock strap
- Buy/chew tobacco
- Talk knowledgeably about cars
- Open doors for men

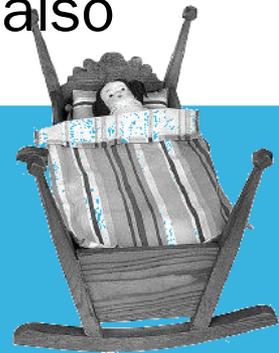
## **Norm Violations by Men**

- Wear fingernail polish
- Needlepoint in public
- Throw Tupperware party
- Cry in public
- Have pedicure
- Apply to baby-sit
- Shave body hair



# Gender Role Socialization

- Gender is socially constructed and is learned behavior.
- Parents are normally the first and most crucial agents of socialization.
- Other adults, older siblings, mass media, religious institutions and educational institutions also exert important influence.
- Self-image develops in males and females through identification with the same gender.
- Though females have been more severely restricted than males by traditional gender roles, those roles have also restricted males.





# Gender Role Socialization

- The research of anthropologist Margaret Mead points to the importance of **cultural conditioning** in defining the social roles of males and females.
- Boys who successfully adapt to cultural standards of masculinity may grow up to be inexpressive men who cannot share their feelings with others.
- In the US, the social construction of gender continues to define **significantly different expectations** for females and males.



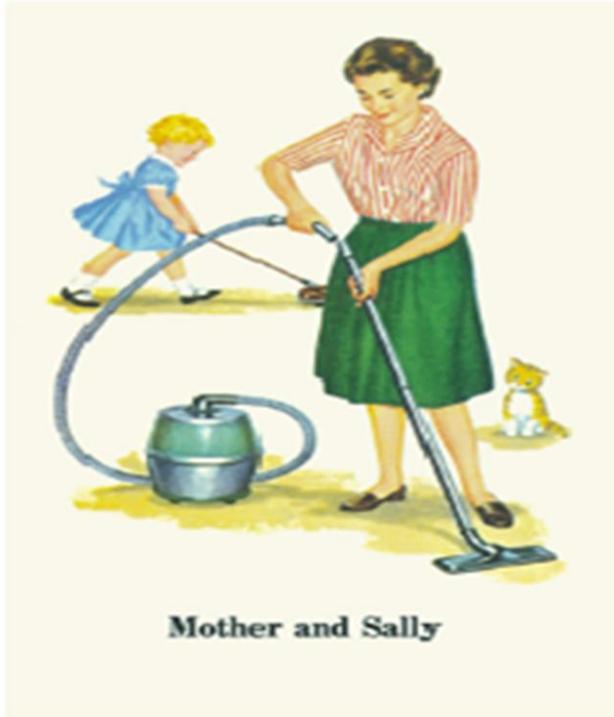
# Gender Role Socialization

## Gender Roles in the US

- boys must be:
  - masculine
  - aggressive
  - tough
  - daring
  - dominant
- girls must be:
  - feminine
  - soft
  - emotional
  - sweet
  - submissive



# 1940s-1950s *Dick and Jane* Readers' Gender Messages



The "Dick and Jane" readers were the top selling readers in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. In addition to reading, they taught "gender messages."



Housework is "women's work," a lesson girls should learn early in life.



# 1940s-1950s *Dick and Jane* Readers' Gender Messages



What does this page teach children other than how to read the word "Father"?



Besides learning words like "pigs" (relevant at that historical period), boys and girls also learned that rough outside work was for men.



# 1970s US Children's Book Illustration of Gender Roles



Boys are pilots.



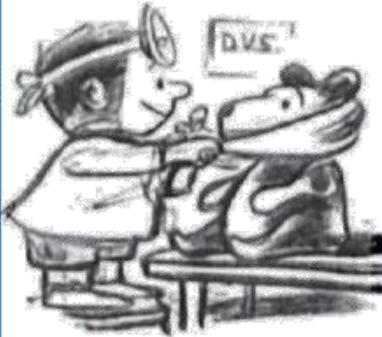
Girls are stewardesses.



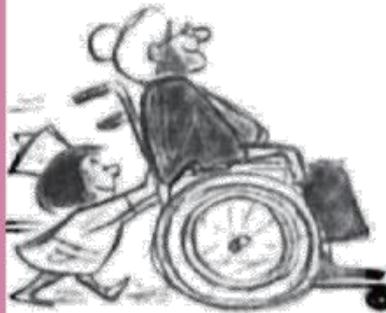
Boys are presidents.



Girls are First Ladies.



Boys are doctors.



Girls are nurses.



Boys build houses.



Girls keep houses.



# Resisting Gender Role Socialization

- Rigid stereotyping can have psychological and social consequences for individuals ... for men: guilt, anxiety, early death ... for women: superwoman image, beauty image
- Increasing numbers of US men criticize restrictive aspects of the traditional male gender role.
- Every society has men and women who resist and successfully oppose stereotypes.

Sociologists have challenged the traditional view that masculinity and femininity are born into. Rather we are socialized.





# Sex and Gender Discrimination

- Patterns of gender discrimination exist in everyday life.
- **sexism**: ideology that one sex is superior to the other
  - Generally used to refer to male prejudice and discrimination against women.
  - **institutional discrimination**: denial of opportunities and equal rights to individuals and groups that results from normal operations of society

- US society is run by male-dominated institutions.





# Sex and Gender Discrimination

- Females' capacities, interests, attitudes and contributions are not taken as seriously as males'. Example: The worst insult to a male is that he is a sissy or that he does things like a girl.
- Patterns of **conversation reflect inequalities** between men and women. Men are more likely to interrupt a conversation and control a change in topics.
- Job advertisements are often **sex-typed**, either by identifying preferred sex or through a description of the preferred individual.



# Sex and Gender Discrimination

- Applicant interviewers frequently discriminate against or discourage **applicants for sex-inappropriate jobs**.
- **homophobia**: fear of and prejudice against homosexuality
- **sexual harassment**: behavior that occurs when work benefits are made contingent on sexual favors or when touching, lewd comments or the appearance of pornographic material creates a *hostile environment* in the workplace
- Must be understood in the context of continuing prejudice and discrimination against women.





# Symbolic Interactionist Perspective on Gender Stratification

- studies micro level of everyday behavior
- Both masculinity and femininity are **performed gender identities**, in the sense that gender is something we do or perform, not something we are.
- **An individual's perception of himself or herself is based primarily on how society views him or her.**
- **violence against women:** association of strength, virility with violence



# Symbolic Interactionist Perspective on Gender Stratification

- Gender is produced and reinforced through daily interactions and the use of symbols.
- Men are more likely than women to...
  - change topics of conversation
  - ignore topics chosen by women
  - minimize ideas of women
  - interrupt women

**Studies show that men initiate up to 96% of all interruptions in cross-sex conversations.**





# Symbolic Interactionist Perspective on Gender Stratification

- West and Zimmerman
  - When people perform tasks or possess characteristics based on the gender role assigned to them, they are said to be *doing gender* (rather than being gender).
  - Gender is maintained through **accountability**. Men and women are expected to perform their gender to the point that it is naturalized, and thus, their status depends on their performance.



# Structural Functionalist Perspective on Gender Stratification

- Gender differentiation contributes to social stability.
- This perspective suggests that gender inequalities exist as an efficient way to create a division of labor, or as a social system in which a particular segment of the population is clearly responsible for certain acts of labor and another segment is clearly responsible for other labor acts.
- Predefined gender roles are complementary: women take care of the home and men provide for the family.





# Structural Functionalist Perspective on Gender Stratification

- Talcott Parsons' formulation of the domestic division of labor
  - expressive role: concern for maintenance of harmony and internal emotional affairs of family
  - task role: emphasis on tasks, a focus on more distant goals, concern for external relationships between one's family and other social institutions
  - assumes a heteronormative (promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation) and patriarchally organized (organized and run by men) nuclear family unit



# Conflict Perspective on Gender Stratification

- The relationship between men and women is traditionally one of unequal power.
- Men, as the dominant gender, subordinate women in order to maintain power and privilege in society.
- Gender differences are a result of subjugation of women by men.
- **Frederich Engels** compared the family structure to the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, suggesting that women have less power than men in the household because they are dependent on them for wages.

**Gender Stratification  
may be functional for  
men who hold the  
power and privilege –  
but it is hardly in the  
interests of women.**





# Conflict Perspective on Gender Stratification

- Male dominance shows up in people's everyday interactions.
- Men, like any other group with a power or wealth advantage, fight to maintain their control over resources (political and economic power) and will not voluntarily give up their current beneficial positions of power.
- As men lose power, they reassert their dominance through violence.
- Conflict between the two groups causes things like the Women's Suffrage Movement and is responsible for social change.



# Feminist Perspective on Gender Stratification

- The feminist perspective uses the conflict approach to examine the reinforcement of gender roles and inequalities, highlighting the role of patriarchy in maintaining the oppression of women.
- Gender stratification occurs when gender differences give men greater privilege and power over women, transgender and gender-non-conforming people.
- Feminism focuses on the theory of patriarchy as a system of power that organizes society into a complex of relationships based on the assertion of male supremacy.





# Feminist Perspective on Gender Stratification

- Women's subjugation coincided with the rise of private property during industrialization.
- Oppression of women is inevitable in all male-dominated societies.
- In US, male dominance goes far beyond the economic sphere.
- **Mary Ann Weathers:** White women face a different form of discrimination than working class women of color, who additionally must fight racism and class oppression.





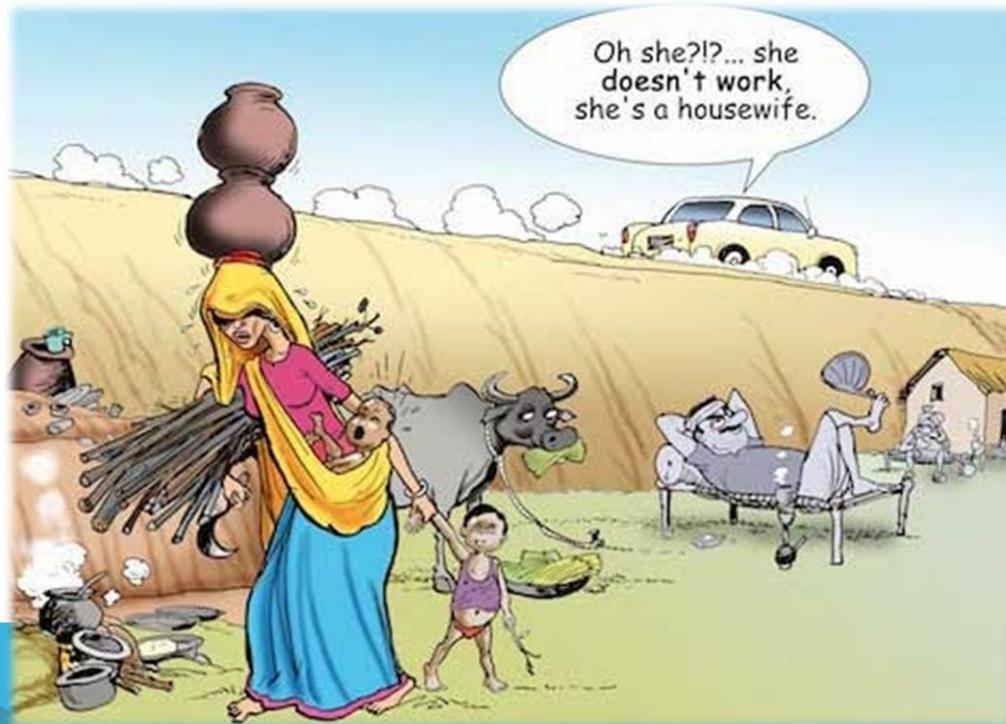
# Global Perspective: Gender and Inequality

- **how females became a minority group:** The main sociological theory explaining the origin of the patriarchy (men dominating society) centers on **reproduction**.
- As a result of pregnancy and breast-feeding, women assumed tasks associated with home and child care.
- Men took over tasks such as hunting, which allowed them to make contact with other tribes.
- Male prestige resulted from their accumulation of possessions through trade and war with other groups.
- Superior weapons, possessions and knowledge assured they had social power over women.



# Global Perspective: Gender and Inequality

- Women's subordination is institutionally sanctioned.
- Women remain in second-class positions in most of the world.



AH, SHE SAYS SHE WANTS TO BE AN ENGINEER. ISN'T THAT CUTE?

LET'S SEE YOU CALL ME CUTE WHEN I'VE BUILT A FEW MISSILES...



continued in  
Social Stratification:  
Sex and Gender Part II

